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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 001057

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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON RELATIONS WITH  
CENTRAL AFRICA AND THE U.S.

REF: YAOUNDE 1007

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SCOTT TICKNOR FOR REASONS 1.4 (D) AND (E)

¶1. (C) Summary: On December 10, Ambassador met with Minister in Charge of Special Duties at the Presidency and Secretary General of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) party Rene Sadi for a tour d'horizon of regional and national developments. Sadi explained President Biya's regional activism as filling a void left by the death of former President Omar Bongo. Despite the Foreign Minister's recent criticism of Ambassador and others (criticism allegedly coming from Biya - reftel), Sadi said that he and others in the Government of Cameroon (GRC) accepted that the United States would voice its opinions at times. He hoped criticism could be relayed privately and warned against being used by some Cameroonians for their own purposes. He urged understanding of Cameroon's history of political and economic challenges. End summary.

Biya and Central Africa  
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¶2. (C) President Biya has for many years let former Gabonese President Omar Bongo take center stage on Central African regional issues. Bongo liked being an Africa-wide leader and sought roles as a mediator. Biya, by contrast, got frustrated with the time he was wasting in travel and participation in Africa-wide conferences and events that he thought didn't produce results. Biya preferred to focus on socio/economic and political events at home, Sadi said.

¶3. (C) With Bongo's death, Biya is beginning to fill the void and exert what Sadi saw as Cameroon's "natural" leadership as one of the biggest countries and economies in the region. Countries in Central Africa appreciate Biya's wisdom and skills, Sadi continued, arguing that neighbors not only don't contest Biya's regional leadership but they want him to assume this role.

¶4. (C) Recent visits to Cameroon by President-elect Ali Bongo (September 11), Chadian President Idriss Deby (October 28) and Francois Bozize (December 8-9) highlighted the priority of security and economic relations in the region, according to Sadi. He pointed to continued instability in Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, ongoing concerns about security in Equatorial Guinea (EG), and banditry in Cameroon's Grand North (which he blamed in part on former Chadian soldiers). He described relations with EG as "not bad," praising Biya's skill in managing tensions caused when Cameroonians have been thrown out of EG.

¶5. (C) Biya had "tried to calm spirits" during the tense recent pre-election period in Gabon, meeting with all the Gabonese players, although he didn't want to play this role in the future, Sadi said. (Note: Director for Americas at the Ministry of External Affairs told us separately that the Government of Cameroon had indicated it would intervene

militarily if necessary to secure peace in the post-election period in Gabon. End note.) Ambassador suggested (somewhat wistfully) that Cameroon might play a role in encouraging democracy in the region. Sadi agreed that Cameroon could set a good example - "we don't persecute opponents" he offered.

#### U.S.-Cameroon Relations

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¶6. (C) Ambassador expressed surprise and concern about President Biya's November 25 message to her and other Ambassadors, as delivered by Foreign Minister Henri Eyebe Ayissi, that they should not criticize the government, especially the newly created Electoral Commission (ELECAM), per reftel. The message was too strong and was starting to generate questions in the international community about Biya's intentions, she said. She explained that the U.S. diplomatic style was to speak openly about problems, even to friends.

¶7. (C) Sadi said he understood diplomats had a responsibility to inform their governments. The Ministry of External Relations wasn't trying to tell diplomats they shouldn't talk about problems or report back to headquarters. The principle of non-interference was "depasse" in modern diplomacy. The GRC knew diplomats had opinions and welcomed constructive criticism but hoped views would be expressed "prudently," through direct dialogue with senior government officials. Some acts could be seen as "unfriendly" and diplomats had to be careful not to be used by local contacts pursuing their own agendas. "If you want to help us, don't always believe what others tell you," he pleaded, conceding

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that Minister Ayissi's style had been "abrupt and surprising". Cameroon knows that the United States stands for democracy and that our foreign policy style (from President Obama on down) is to say what we think, Sadi noted.

#### Cameroon's Challenges

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¶8. (C) Sadi was optimistic about Cameroon's future but pleaded for more understanding about its historical challenges. Cameroonians knew they could have done much better had it not been for decades of setbacks. The 1984 coup attempt had "an enormous impact" and the 1987-91 economic downturn took twenty years to manage. The early democratic transition (1990-92) brought the "villes mortes" ("ghost towns" - nationwide strikes) which had "an extraordinarily bad impact," the IMF structural adjustment of the late 1980s through the mid-90s required major sacrifices and changes. The 1994 devaluation resulted in a major salary cut for civil servants and the current global economic crisis has badly hurt the economy. He lamented Cameroon's bad roads, lack of national spirit, and individualized politics as factors which keep Cameroon from reaching its potential.

#### Comment

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¶9. (C) After over 18 years at the Presidency, Sadi is President Biya's top diplomatic advisor and one of his closest confidantes. He took pains to reassure us that he and Biya "understand our good friends" even if "some take criticism badly," leaving it unclear whether Ayissi's earlier demarche truly came from Biya. Sadi was more relaxed and friendly than in previous meetings, although he complained about his long hours. When asked about how he balances his role in the presidency and the party, he responded "they're almost the same thing." He's a man to watch in both circles and is often viewed as a possible successor to Biya. From this and other meetings we have had with him, Sadi would make an intelligent, reasonable and generally pro-American (although low-key and not particularly democratic) possible

next President of Cameroon.  
GARVEY